

## ARCHETYPAL SYMBOLS AND MOTIFS IN PEARL S BUCK'S *THE GOOD EARTH*

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### ABSTRACT

American author Pearl S Buck is the first woman who was awarded both the Nobel Prize and Pulitzer prizes for literature. As a child and woman living in two cultures she has developed a keen understanding of different cultures and has gained respect for the human dignity of the people. Pearl S Buck (1892-1973) was born in Hillsborough west Virginia. She grew up in China, where her parents were missionaries, but was educated in Randolph - Macon Woman's college. After her graduation she returned to china and lived there until 1934 with exception of a year spent at Cornell University, where she took MA in 1926. Pearl Buck began to write in twenties: Her first novel *East Wind West Wind* appeared in 1930 followed by *The Good Earth* which remained in American list of best sellers for many years and earned her several awards.

**KEYWORDS:** Motifs in Pearl S Buck's *the Good Earth*

### INTRODUCTION

An archetype is the first real example or prototype of something. Brunel aptly defines "an archetype can be considered as an ideal model, the supreme type or the perfect image of something that exists in the world". A universally recognizable element that occurs all over the world and literature "Archetypes are repeated patterns that recur in the literature of every age" (Sloan 48)

Carl Jung calls it collective unconscious of the human race, prototypes rather than something gained from experience. It is the repeated patterns that exist in literatures of all ages. Carl Jung recognized these patterns in stories and mythologies. The term archetype can be applied to a theme or pattern, idea or plot. Archetypes can be expressed in dreams, literature, religious fantasies and folk lore.

Motifs are recurring structure, contrast or literary device that can help to develop and inform the major themes. The encyclopedia defined motif in literature as the term that denotes the recurrent presence of certain character types, objects, settings or situations in diverse periods of folklore and literature. The novel *The Good Earth* is an excellent form of archetype.

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The novel *The Good Earth* is based on rich Chinese cultural tradition. The novel talks about the nourishing power of the land and the separation from it leads to destruction and alienation for the protagonist Wang Lung and his family.

Wang lung is a hard working traditional bound farmer in china. He has worked up to become a rich farmer. There is an Aristocratic family the Hwangs who go down in life due to hired lab our and the sons corrupt ways. Wang Lung's attachment to the farm makes him a wealthy farmer and his love for the land and nature enriches his moral nature. In contrast the Hwang family suffers loss and estrangement from the land.

Wang lung's life is based on religion and reverence to the family. Wealth corrupts a person. In the Hwang family they spend their life leisurely and waste their time and money. They had to depend on the hired laborers. The older Lord spends money in debauchery and the Lady becomes an opium addict. When Wang Lung marries a poor woman O'lan a slave from the Hwang family he was a simple farmer. O' LAN is an intelligent traditional, dutiful wife of Wang Lung. She is a loyal wife to Wang Lung and helps in the growth of her husband. She begets three children. She commits female infanticide by killing her baby daughters to save her from poverty. They suffer poverty and had to even kill their cow to feed the family. They travel to town and they even indulge in robbery to get some money. Wang lung finds that his sons have become disobedient and there was a lack of culture. Wang Lung was so attached to the land that he goes back to his land. He becomes so prosperous to even buy the land and the house of his masters Hwangs who were the rich land lords. The modernization of China has produced cultural conflicts.

*The Good Earth* by Pearl S Buck provides an excellent form of archetypal motif. The rise and fall of the protagonist, his crisis and the narrative pattern using compare and contrast and various themes show that it is a perfect example of archetypal motif. It shows how nature is clean and pure while the mechanist world is corrupt and evil. The three archetypal motifs that are provided in the novel are nature providing, money corrupting and how the law of the land is the only right way. The entire story story expounds that nature is always providing. Wang Lung got his field by ploughing and farming the land for many years. As Wang Lung did his part nature reciprocated by helping him out. His relationship with the knowledge of the land and the climate was so good to the extent that he could predict whether it will be a good year or not.

The archetypal motifs are caricatured throughout the novel. The term archetype signifies narrative designs, character type and images which are found in variety of works of literature. According to Northrop Frye, 'Archetype denotes recurring narrative designs, patterns, character type or images which are said to be identifiable in the novel. Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the texts major themes. The novel *The Good Earth* provides excellent archetypal structure. It shows how nature is pure and clean while the mechanist world is corrupt and evil. Common motifs that run throughout the novel are journey, fall, death and rebirth. According to Frye, "Symbols are the collective unconscious that makes certain association between the outside world and psychic experience. These associations become enduring and are passed from one generation to the next".

Another archetypal motif that is depicted in the novel shows how money corrupts. A statement made in the novel concerning this was, "And everyone knew now that Wang Lung owned this land and in his village there was a talk of making him head" (GE 49). After this statement Wang Lung realized how powerful he was after getting money in life. Money has spoiled the people of the great house. The setting of the novel is pre revolutionary China somewhere in the twentieth centuries. Despite droughts, famine and floods Wang Lung had worked up. He forgets his former state and neglects to remember how his life was just a few months before and this proves how money corrupts a person.

Besotted with pride that wealth had given him, he forgets his past and begins to think that the tea shop that he used to visit was too humble a place for a rich man like him. He found it hard to condescend to eating or drinking with

common people at the same shop. This sudden impulse arose in him led him to a luxurious tea shop where men sort immoral pleasures. He fell a victim to irresistible desire in having fallen for a woman Lotus. He spends his best fortunes for her and brings her home. Lotus brings Cuckoo along with her. His marital bliss and peaceful atmosphere in the house is lost once he brings his concubines home.

The archetypal structure that is expounded in the essay is that the law of the land is the only way. The statement in the novel aptly states that, "There was only this perfect movement, of turning this earth over and over to the sun, this earth which formed their home and fed their bodies and made their gods" (TGE 56). All their lives depended on the earth.

*The Good Earth* is a novel in the form of biography. The story is told chronologically from the hero's manhood to his old age, a period covering roughly forty years. The novel is made up of thirty four chapters and falls into two main parts. The first fourteen chapters show Wang Lung's commitment to the land and depict his solid family relationships with wife and father. His achievement of modest prosperity is followed by a sudden reversal of fortune in the form of poverty and famine, which drives his family to the city to be hired labourers. The life in the city provides a contrast to the life in the country. The climax of the first part of the book occurs when the city unrest leads Wang Lung and his wife to join raids in the rich man's house. The money and the jewels they steal enable them to return to the land. The illegal gain provides a turning point of Wang Lung's life and fortune. This narrative pattern highlights the novel as a perfect example of archetypal motif.

Wang Lung was a thrifty, naïve, humble and a superstitious farmer. As a youth he was excited on the day of his wedding with dreamy feelings when he joined hands with O' Lan a slave girl from the great house. His early married life was blessed with good fortunes and harvests. When his wife delivered a male child he was happy and triumphant. His popularity in the village rose along with prosperity. He was always frugal and the land was his flesh and blood. His prosperity fell during the droughts when all his grains were stolen. He migrates to south where food was abundant. "He lived in a rich city as alien as a rat in a rich man's house that is fed on scraps thrown away and hides here and there and is never a part of the real life of the house" (TGE 91). He suffers a lot in the town and his miseries come to an abrupt end through his ill gotten means. After his return to the land he sowed good seeds working heartily in his land as ever. He held to his unpretentious ways of living.

This way of life was interrupted by the advent of floods. His wife O lan was a very dutiful and faithful wife who lived happily with him at good times and bad times. She bore him children. She did not have short feet like other Chinese women. Wang Lung also has two concubines Lotus and Cuckoo. Olan is loyal and she works constantly. She worked both at home and in the fields. She is never idle and she never complains. She is brown in colour which is the colour of the soil. She brought her husband good fortune. Wang Lung could realize the difference between his wife and the concubines. Olan, though a bit rude mother is a practical mother. She steals, kills her new born baby and sells her daughter which is considered cruel but she does to solve the cruel financial problems the family faces. Olan is compared to earth. Both Olan and the earth are brown in colour which represents fertility and fruition.

Another archetypal motif is comparison and contrast. Pearl S Buck highlights Wang Lung's city life and town life, before marriage and after marriage, life with his wife and concubine. His rise from fortune to fall at the time of famine, the crisis he undergoes with his family and also the crisis undergone in town life is depicted. His act of stealing gains him material benefits. His bondage with the earth makes forces him to return to the land and helps him to attain prosperity once again. After the death of his wife Wang Lung falls once again when his son tries to sell his land which is dear to him as his

life.

The second part of *The Good Earth* follows Wang Lung's fortunes from his return to the land for he has purchased more and more land to his eventual acquisition of his land owner's mansion for they were the former grand family of the district. His rise in fortune is accompanied by its fall. This forces him to alienate him from his family. In the last five chapters Wang Lung is portrayed as a sad and lonely man. He has lost his wife and his father. His sons do not wish to follow the traditional ways of the ancestors and are less attached to the land. He moves back to his farm house with a young slave girl and his mentally retarded daughter.

Foot binding is a symbol used by Buck. Foot binding is a traditional practice in Chinese culture for it was considered to be an attractive female trait. Foot binding was a practice in traditional China for over thousand years. The feet would become small and stunted. When the girl is between ages of five and seven their feet are bound for the Chinese believed that it was fortunate to have a small feet. All the toes would be bound except her big toe beneath the foot and a bandage is tightly wrapped to gold the foot into half. It was a painful process and produced a bad odour.

The pain lasted throughout the woman's life. Buck showed foot binding as a symbol of moral depravity. Olan binds her daughter's feet because she was given less attention by Wang Lung. She did not want her daughter to suffer like her. She desires her daughter to have a happy married life with her husbandwoman is a practical woman who is the cause of success in her family. Olan is a good cook, mends clothes, shoes, mend walls and still works in the fields. Wang Lung is more interested in pride and contentment rather than the well being of the family. He consented to his eldest son's proposal of renting the great house for an exorbitant prize. He thought he would get a greater satisfaction in his life by being able to live in the great house where he had undergone great humiliation when he went there for the slave girl Olan. His wealth had stood him in stead in some of the important cases in life. But it is wealth itself had made him an irrevocable loser in the end by tempting his sons to sell his lands which were to Wang Lung was his life blood, pride and joy.

The earth is the archetypal symbol which recurs throughout the novel. There is the prevailing sense that the earth is the provider of all basic things needed to sustain life. There is also the sense that the earth is the centre where man rises from and ultimately returns to it at the end of his life. These sentiments are established from the very beginning of the novel. Lang and Wang Lung work together harmoniously, both have a deep reverence for the land. He believes that land is directly connected with life and could not imagine how the Hwangs are going to part with their land. Wang Lung works seven consecutive days to save the land when it is attacked by Locusts. Olan in her deathbed asks her husband not to sell the land whatever happens to her. She also tells him that even if she dies the land will remain with him. The prominent theme is the nourishing power of the land. Extended family system and polygamy is prominent in ancient Chinese culture.

The novel is plainly a manifestation of man's weakness and his defenseless nature against the on rush of pride, passion and wealth in life. When Wang Lung's sons are planning to sell the land he becomes emotional. He shouts hysterically, appalled and distressed unable to control his tears at the mention of selling his land "It is the end of the family-when they begin to sell the land, Out of the land we came and into it we must go-and if you will hold the land you can live-no one can rob you of land"(TGE 313).

*The Good Earth* is a third person narrative, but the story it tells is of Wang Lung's. The archetypal pattern of narration from fortune to crisis and from crisis to fortune and the final spiritual fall is the recurrent narrative structure depicted. The story is narrated based on Wang Lung's experience. Olan at times breaks her customary silence to advice her

husband and partakes with him at good times and bad times. Wang Lung, the farmer is a typical archetypal symbol for the story is narrated through his point of view. The Good Earth permeates and binds the entire tale. Land is a vital component in a farmer's life and Wang Lung has given utmost importance to the land. Through all obstacles the land was always there waiting for Wang Lung, either as a poor farmer or a rich landowner. The main theme of *The Good Earth* is the good earth itself. The author gives a picture of China which was occupied by the communists.

When Buck wrote the novel only the men, women and the children stood before her. She realized that they were not Chinese but farming community from all over the world. They were universal in their struggles, in their joys and sorrows. Buck is known for her mastery over language, technique and style. The novel is a very good example of archetypal motifs and symbols structure, pattern that run throughout the novel. The rise and fall of hero from prosperity to poverty, the contrast with characters are universal patterns themselves. The theme of triumph of the natural world over the mechanical worlds is highlighted. Buck's mastery over the traditional Chinese culture and her association with them is reflected in a biblical style. The novel *The Good Earth* for the first time made the Americans recognize the Chinese as their neighbours.

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